

## In Nomine Iesu

### The First Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord 2023

#### How does this man know? – John 7:14-18

“Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’ Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear friends, believers in the God of grace who sent His Son for us:

Jesus came from a carpenter’s family. He lived in a small city of Galilee. It would not be unfair to say that Capernaum was to Jerusalem as Yelm is to Tacoma. There were no highly regarded schools in Capernaum, none in all of Galilee for that matter. And Jesus certainly hadn’t studied under any of the revered rabbis of Jerusalem. Neither was he a son of Levi, so he had never worked in the temple with all the knowledge and experience that would have given him. So, the question was asked early in His ministry by those who heard Him, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” A more accurate translation would be, “having never been educated.”

How does He know the Bible so well? Every time He is asked to stand up and read in the synagogue, He reads clearly, explains what He’s read in such a way that everyone knows He is right. When He speaks to the multitudes, He takes examples from things around Him and uses them to illustrate so clearly the plain sense of Moses and David, Isaiah and Jeremiah. He stands in the temple or walks through the streets, and any and every question He is asked He answers from God’s word, so that the person asking the question knows that God Himself has supplied the answer. The chief priests and elders, Sadducees and Pharisees, can never prove Him wrong. How does this Man know what the Bible teaches so well?

#### I

Doctrine is the collection of truths found in the Bible. Since we just had Christmas, we can use the birth of Jesus as our example. The Bible very plainly teaches in the Old Testament book of Isaiah and in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke that Mary conceived and gave birth to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, without a human father. She was a virgin. Because of this plain teaching of the Scriptures, it is a doctrine, a teaching, of the Christian church that Christ was born of the virgin Mary. So important is this doctrine that it became part of all three creeds, the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian. Together with the doctrine that God created heaven and earth, that He exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet remains One, that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, took on Himself human flesh and then lived and died in our place to redeem us from the guilt and penalty of our sins, that He rose bodily on Easter Sunday, that the Holy Spirit is the true Author of the Holy Scriptures, the doctrine that the Son of God is also the Son of Mary is, with them, the very foundation of the church. These together are Christian doctrine.

It is these very things that are so noticeably missing in the teaching and preaching to be found in so many churches today. Preaching and teaching in such churches today have a different foundation, aimed at making people feel better about themselves, telling them how to fix their own lives and so live victoriously – whatever that is - or to go into the world and change things so that the world will become a better place. Preaching and teaching today is not focused on the truths of the Holy Scriptures, the truths about sin, death, and hell, and the eternal and gracious God, who sent His only begotten Son into the world to redeem mankind from sin, death, and hell.

When was the last time you were in a Christian bookstore and saw that the latest books being promoted by publishers, the ones really selling, were about the things we confess in the Apostles' or Nicene Creed? When was the last time you saw any book, CD or DVD advertised that dealt with the Trinitarian nature of God or the central teaching of Scripture, that one is justified by grace through faith for Jesus' sake? You haven't, have you? Why is that?

When did you ever hear of a preacher who became renowned for the preaching of Christ crucified for sinners? Or of one who has so many hearers because he teaches the whole counsel of God, as the Apostle Paul exhorted the pastors of the church of Ephesus to do? (cf. Acts 20:27) In fact, whether it be on some Christian television program or at the nearest Wal-Mart sized community church, what is at the center of attention, the focus? Is it Christ the Savior, His life and His works, and the doctrines of the Bible or is it the dynamic preacher who inspires people to transform their lives for the better with their own commitment, efforts, and works?

## II

It was not much different in Jesus' own day. The Pharisees and Sadducees, Zealots and Herodians, were each more committed to their own particular doctrines than to the doctrines of the Scriptures. Many of them, priests and Levites, ruling elders and the people they ruled, didn't understand what the Word of God said about the coming Messiah, because they no longer understood the doctrines of the Bible. So, they had different expectations of what He would be and what He would do. Their question was: Is this Man Jesus the promised Messiah? He attracted them because His doctrine was so profound, so powerful in its certainty, and yet so obviously in total agreement with plain meaning of the words of the Scriptures. Yet He also repelled them because He claimed to be God in the flesh. We see this in our text: "And the Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?'" (v. 15) Why, they fumed, He is a Galilean carpenter's son of all things! He is an ordinary man with no education. How does He know the Scriptures so well? How can He teach doctrine, and yet not be a priest or Levite? How can He point out to Pharisees and Sadducees alike their errors directly from the Scriptures, and leave them speechless?

He said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me." (v. 16) But it is not that He knew all things as God. Yes, Jesus is indeed the eternal Son of God. But the Bible teaches that He humbled Himself. He took the form of a servant. He did not use all the power that was His. No, dear friends, in His humiliation, He knew doctrine from the same source we do: the Holy Scriptures. But there is a difference: He read and heard the Word of God unhindered by sin as we are. This is why He understood them fully, and could use them to prove wrong both scribe and priest. This is why many believed Him. They could not help themselves. When they heard His doctrine they found themselves thinking: This is Truth in human flesh. This is the Word of God.

If anyone desired to do God's will, Jesus told the people, wanted to be a child of God, that person would know that He taught truth. Many believed Him. They believed Him to be not just a prophet sent by God, but the very Messiah Himself, the One of whom the Scriptures spoke. He arose, as we heard last Sunday, in the very place that Isaiah foretold that the light of heaven would rise and shine and shine on all. A short time before the events of today's text He said to the scribes and Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Me. And yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40)

If God's truth is stated plainly for people in the Scriptures, and if that truth has as its purpose to reveal Christ, it follows that to teach Christian doctrine is to teach Christ. If Christian doctrine - the catechism we learn, the creeds we confess, the liturgy we use, the hymns we sing, the readings of Scripture we hear - if these are regularly used, are we not hearing Christ? Is He not coming to us, standing in our midst, speaking to us, just as He spoke to His own people? In fact, isn't this the very substance of His promise: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them"? (Matthew 18:20)

Dear friends, this Sunday when we hear about the 12-year-old Jesus being taken to the temple by Mary and Joseph, as was their custom, their habit, their routine, the holy rut they were in - may we all be in such a holy rut! - let us understand that Jesus knew the Scriptures because His whole life, **from childhood on**, was woven around the Holy Scriptures, God's word. His parents trained Him in the way He should go. And He obeyed them, perfectly, as we have not always done! And all the blessings of His training and life are offered to us in the Bible! To be sure, we are not without sin as He was. We will not know the doctrines of the Scriptures as clearly as He did in this world of sin. We will struggle with the meaning of the Scriptures. But we know that they are life and truth! They bring us Christ, and with Him all that He came into the world to do for us through His perfect life and sacrificial death: that is, forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. And did not He, who knew the Scriptures so well, also promise to send the Spirit of God to help us remember and understand? He did!

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Wherever Christ and the doctrines of the Bible are taught plainly and truly, there will be tension and, at times, even division. This happened in Jesus' own day when He did the teaching Himself! Some accept His word as truth, desiring to hear more of Him and only Him. Others hear and object, even reject. Don't let this discourage you. Just remember that as we have Christ by faith and hold on to Him and to His doctrine, we have everything. We have forgiveness for our sins, not just temporary fixes. We have salvation, not just seemingly improved life here and now. We have eternal life here and now, and forever, and not just something that we lose when we die. If Christ's doctrine is glorified in our preaching, our worship, our belief, our heart, then rejoice with the angels of heaven! If Christ is who you come to church to hear, knowing what He promises this to you, then praise God! For Jesus also promised you this: "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) How does this Man know these things? Because He is the Christ, who came into the world for you. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**